



Vancouver Board of Education

School District No. 39

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

1580 West Broadway

Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5K8

Telephone: 604-713-5000

Fax: 604-713-5049

August 29, 2014

The Honourable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education
P. O. Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister:

Re: Vancouver Project Office

Attached is a signed copy of the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) Seismic Mitigation Project Office Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The VBE is pleased to sign this MOU in order to facilitate and accelerate the completion of seismic mitigation projects for Vancouver schools.

As you are aware, the VBE raised the concept of a Project Office with the Province 4 – 5 years ago. In May of 2011, I wrote to the then Minister of Education George Abbott proposing the establishment of such an office (see attached). Most recently, we have been discussing the details of a Project Office with you and Ministry of Education staff since last April.

In May of this year, we submitted a signed MOU for your approval. We did not hear back from you until just recently.

Although funding for a Project Office was available in contingency reserve funds in Vancouver seismic capital project budgets for the last two years, the Ministry of Education did not provide us access to these funds. Now that an MOU with respect to the Project Office has been signed, we look forward to accessing these funds to assist in establishing the Project Office.

We are pleased that we finally have a signed MOU with respect to the Project Office. However, the VBE Board did take exception with the heavy-handed manner which the Province approached finalizing the agreement. Although the VBE is not completely comfortable with some of the terms and wording of the MOU, the Board agreed to sign the MOU so as to ensure no further delays are incurred and with the hope that these items can be further clarified as we proceed.

Some of the items that require further clarification and discussion include:

- The ability for the VBE Board, as a democratically elected body, to express its view publicly regarding seismic mitigation projects without having to obtain the prior endorsement of the senior staff led Steering Committee.
- Owing to the significant deferred maintenance work (e.g. roof and heating plant replacements) that are required with respect to a number of seismic mitigation projects, it may be more cost effective in the long run to replace a school rather than only seismically upgrading it. Accordingly, it is hoped that each project will undergo a full business case approach before a preferred option is recommended.

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Board of School Trustees:

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- In terms of the development of a long range facilities plan, there are many ways to achieve an increase in school capacity utilization including an increase in enrolment, downsizing of buildings during seismic mitigation and shared use with the community.
- Schools are a focal point in the community. It is important to continue to involve the school community and stakeholders in the design and development of seismic mitigation projects.

The VBE urges that the Steering Committee be established as soon as possible so we can work collaboratively on the above issues and begin the transition to the Project Office.

The VBE has a strong record of managing and completing capital projects with qualified and dedicated staff. We have a number of projects in the planning, design and construction phases which need to continue as we transition to the Project Office. In order to maintain this momentum and retain the knowledge and experience with Vancouver schools, the existing VBE capital projects staff should form the core of the Project Office, while the Steering Committee decides what other staff and resources will be required.

Again, the VBE is pleased to sign this MOU and we look forward to completing the remaining seismic projects for Vancouver schools by 2020.

Sincerely,



Patti Bacchus
Chairperson

cc: Vancouver Board of Education Trustees
S. Cardwell, Superintendent of Schools
R. Krowchuk, Secretary Treasurer